



ABIDING IN CHRIST,
ABOUNDING IN HOPE

AUG./SEPT. 2006

SECTION B

VOICES & VISIONS

Southeast Conference Gathers in Birmingham

SEC Annual Meeting Welcomes Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Celebrates the Conclusion of Rekindle the Gift

By Rev. Dr. Timothy Downs

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The 40th Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference was a moving occasion, gathering for the first time in two years. Graciously hosted by First Congregational Christian United Church of Christ, Birmingham, the Conference celebrated the 140 years of the work of the American Missionary Association (AMA) in the South and recognized the ending of the *Rekindle the Gift* program.

The Conference looked to its future, as it approved the revision of its Constitution and Bylaws and approved a study leading to a capital campaign.

Following dinner on June 9, more than 250 people gathered to for the meeting's opening worship. Rev. Susan Mitchell led the opening procession of representatives from the Associations of the Conference, the oldest and newest congregations, and youth and elders. Each representative poured water into the baptismal fount, which was then blessed. The service continued with the inspiring music of the Holy Trinity Community Choir of Nashville and the dynamic preaching of Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright.

"The preaching was the very best," said Dorothy Gager, moderator of the Annual Meeting. "And the stirring music from the choir of Holy Trinity helped make the worship service a high point for me."

Saturday morning opened with a Service of Remembrance, during which names of members of our congregations who had died over the last two years were lifted up in prayer and song. A Service of Celebration followed, with preachers Susan Mitchell and Joyce Hollyday lifting up in story and word the great legacy of the AMA in the South.

A moving tribute followed honoring



Above: Representatives carried and poured water into the baptismal font, which was then blessed to open the Annual Meeting. Right: Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright delivered a rousing sermon.

Milton Hurst, who during his life gifted the Southeast Conference and the United Church of Christ as a leader and dear friend.

"While listening our dearly missed Rev. Milton Hurst's wonderful voice and wisdom, I found myself hoping that someone had given a copy of the DVD to his family," Gager said. "Then the delightful people sitting behind me were introduced as members of his family!"

The business of the Annual Meeting followed lunch, moderated by Dorothy Gager. The Meeting approved the 2006 budget, agreed to undertake a study of the feasibility of a capital campaign, and adopted a new Constitution and Bylaws.

Two resolutions, submitted by Central



Congregational UCC in Atlanta, were passed without dissent: One to promote peace in Darfur, and another promoting fair-and-just immigration. The meeting ended with the installation of new officers under the terms of the new Bylaws.

TAP PROGRAM AWARDED CARPENTER GRANT

The Southeast Conference learned July 7 from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation that the Theology Among the People (TAP) program has been awarded a three-year grant in the amount of \$200,000.

This funding will enable the SEC to partner with seminaries and universities, including Lancaster Theological School and Vanderbilt Divinity School, to provide summer intensive courses on

their campuses for TAP participants and to make faculty available for teaching in our setting. The funding will also help us to develop the TAP program in other new and exciting venues, including a study abroad program.

In this season of growth and renewal in the Southeast Conference, we are delighted that the TAP program will continue to improve and expand, as strive to provide the highest quality program of alternative theological education possible to our lay leaders and churches.

"I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL . . .
AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISIONS AND
YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS. "

ACTS 2:17

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Dear Friends,

As we gathered in Birmingham from the four corners of the Southeast Conference for the Annual Meeting in June, I was reminded that it has been a while.

FROM THE
CONFERENCE
MINISTER



Christ in Atlanta. Missing an Annual Meeting causes me to recall just how important they are to us. A colleague remarked to me some years ago that the Southeast Conference is like Brigadoon — that mythic village that would rise out of the mists of the Scottish highlands every century or so. The villagers would revel, dance, love, and then Brigadoon would fade into the mists, to appear later at another far off time.

Our 2005 Annual Meeting was cancelled so that we could devote ourselves to hosting the General Synod of the United Church of

Because we are so dispersed over geography, cultures, and traditions of origin, I sometimes think of us as less of a Conference in the traditional sense, and more of

a state of mind — or a Brigadoon which gathers us for a

few days of friendships, worship, song, prayer, and business. Our fellowship is a true gift because there has to be intentionality to our coming together. We choose to travel — often great distances — to be with one other.

And yet, we are the bearers in this time and place of a precious identity, the United Church of Christ, a minor but powerful voice in the South, which over the years has been unapologetically ecumenical, and has always bend toward a Gospel of justice and inclusion in the name of Jesus Christ. This identity has marked us often as “strangers in a strange land.” It was good to be together again after an absence that was too long.

“GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE . . . ”

Yet in the midst of this precious fellowship, I believe that we, the Southeast Conference, are entering a new phase of our life together. We are

coming of age. Technology in recent years has collapsed

the distances that separate us. We are welcoming new congregations into our Conference. The programs which we have come to value — that have equipped our ordained and lay leadership, renewed our congregations, established new churches, and welcomed other congregations — have strengthened us and call us to be more that we have been. We are in the midst of staff transitions, bylaws changes, significant financial challenges, the exploration of a capital campaign to benefit the Conference and many more signs of growing up.

I believe that this coming season is one that is going to require a greater level of intentionality on all of our parts.

We cannot be casual in our commitments to the United Church of Christ as expressed by Our Church Wider Missions (OCWM) Basic Support and expect the Conference to sustain its covenant with our local churches and with the national setting at current levels.

This is a remarkable time for us to be the United Church of Christ in the South. We — who have been in many ways been the object of mission for more than 140 years — are being called now to be a people who generate mission. Many of our congregations and much of our lives as a Conference has been supported by the generosity of partners across the United Church of Christ through the years. This Annual Meeting was an occasion where the stirrings of a challenge began to take place — a challenge to no longer lean on the kindness of others, but to become the vessels of the kindness of Christ to others.

Peace,
Tim Downs

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Downs,
Conference Minister

SEC LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS OFF TO A GREAT START

Leadership is critical to the development, growth and renewal of any organization. As Rev. Bennie Liggins and Rev. Cameron Trimble have traveled throughout the Conference this past year, we have heard your request for continuing education opportunities. We all want to learn about new leadership models, developing and casting vision, radical hospitality, emerging technology, church administration and self-care. In response to your request, we have created Leadership Development Workshops, hosted at the Conference office in Atlanta. We have called together some of the best specialists in the United Church of Christ, men and women who have years of experience and offer a new and helpful perspective to doing ministry in today's world.

The workshops run from 6-9 p.m. on Friday and 8 a.m.-1 p.m. on Saturday. Registration forms are available online at www.secucc.org. The cost for each workshop is \$45.00 which includes materials for the workshops, dinner Friday night and breakfast on Saturday. Please mail your registration forms to Rev. Cameron Trimble at the Conference Office at 1330 West Peachtree Street, Suite 344, Atlanta, GA 30309.

Aug. 4-5: Vision Development
Sept. 8-9: Marks of a Hospitable Church
Sept. 29-30: i-Tools for Today's Leaders
Oct. 20-21: Basic Church Administration
Nov. 17-18: Self Care: Finding a Balance for Healthy Ministry

For Everything, There Is a Season

Farewell to Joyce and Betsy, Welcome to Cameron!

The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is “a time for every matter under heaven,” and so as the Southeast Conference enters a new season. We welcome Cameron Trimble onto our staff, and bid farewell to Joyce Hollyday and Betsy Flory.

Cameron, who began working with the Conference part-time in preparation for General Synod in 2005, began work full-time on June 1. She was ordained on June 4 as Minister of Evangelism and New Church Development for the Southeast Conference. This work is funded by a major two-year grant from Local Church Ministries of the UCC, matching a commitment from the Southeast Conference. This grant commits the Conference to start four new churches, receive six affiliating churches and renew six established churches.

Cameron brings to this important work significant gifts and experiences, having been a part of establishing two new churches in the last six years. Much of Cameron's work will be in identifying, training and supporting new church developers, and securing support and resources for new, affiliating and renewing congregations. In collaboration with Bennie Liggins and Tim Downs, she will be extending the reach of the Conference to new settings to meet new needs for ministry.



Rev. Trimble

At the Annual Meeting, the Conference paused to recognize and celebrate the ministries of Joyce Hollyday and Betsy Flory, and to welcome Cameron Trimble onto the staff. Each of these recognitions marks a significant transition in the life of our Conference.

Joyce served the Conference for nine years, first as Associate Conference Minister for Spirituality and Identity. The position evolved over the early years until the emergence of a project which was named *Rekindle the Gift*, which resulted in the publication of *On the Heels of Freedom* in 2005. Joyce moves on to her work as Co-Pastor of Circle of Mercy (a new church in Asheville, N.C.), two books that she is writing, and her on going work with Word and World, an alternative seminary.

Four and a half years ago, Betsy Flory was called as Director of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference — a half-time position. While during the time, she developed significant youth programming, above all she taught us to see youth and young adults as an integral part of the life of the church. Betsy will continue her youth ministry with Open Community United Church of Christ, a Korean-American congregation in Atlanta, and other youth programming.

VOICES & VISIONS

Voices & Visions, the Southeast Conference United Church of Christ section of the United Church News (USPS 764-070) is published four times a year. Its mission is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members. Views expressed in editorials, letters, and signed columnists are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official Conference or UCC policies.

Southeast Conference United Church of Christ

1330 West Peachtree Street,
Suite #344
Atlanta, GA 30309

Phone: 404-607-1993
800-807-1993 (outside Atlanta)
Fax: 404-607-7939
www.secucc.org

Editor:
Michael Cheek
Contributing Editor:
Timothy C. Downs
Article ideas and submissions
may be directed to the Editor.

Service Welcomes Holy Trinity Community Church

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Holy Trinity Community Church and its 250 members took the final step June 25 in becoming a part of the United Church of Christ at a worship service with almost 300 people in attendance. The service, at which Conference Minister Tim Downs preached, included reception of a local church and the installation of Rev. Cynthia Andrews-Looper as the pastor of the congregation.

The journey into the United Church of Christ for Holy Trinity began a decade ago as a fledgling congregation, which was predominately gay and lesbian. The congregation sought a church that would allow them to use their facilities. They found their way to Brookmeade Congregational UCC where, after nine years, Holy Trinity outgrew the facility with two services and needs throughout the week.

At about that time, Pastor Andrews-Looper began conversations with the Southeast Conference staff. Following many meetings — including meetings with lay leaders, visits to occasions where the UCC gathers, including General Synod XXV — the church voted to seek affiliation with the United Church of Christ. The process of affiliation ended with a vote at the Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Association on April 22 to receive Holy Trinity into fellowship in the UCC.



Conference Minister Rev. Timothy Downs, SEC's Rev. Kathy Clark and Holy Trinity's Rev. Cynthia Andrews-Looper.

The June 25th worship service was a time of powerful music and praise, laughter and tears, and a spirit of great gifts coming together to build the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Contingents of guests in attendance included representatives from Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Howard Congregational UCC, Pleasant Hill Community UCC and First United Church UCC of Cookeville, Tenn. and Glendale Baptist Church, a member of the Alliance of Baptists.

Southeast Conference Honors TAP Graduates

By Rev. Kathy Clark

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The Southeast Conference celebrated June 8 the successful completion of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program with 12 participants from two TAP groups. The three-year journey through the program, however, did not prove as arduous as the journey to Birmingham that evening. Heavy traffic congestion delayed several and kept two graduates from making it altogether. Nonetheless, all were held up and honored for their achievement, whether present or absent.



TAP graduates honored during SEC Annual Meeting.

This was the second TAP graduation to be held within the Southeast Conference. The honorees, other TAP participants and facilitators, families and friends were inspired by keynote speaker Dr. Jeremiah Wright of Trinity UCC of Chicago. Dr. Wright reminded all present that the end of a season is not the end of the story, a maxim which speaks to the idea that learning, especially learning in the faith, is a lifelong endeavor. The 12 TAP graduates are

models of lifelong learning and witness of the summons of St. Paul to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The graduates of TAP include lay men and women who are exercising a variety of leadership roles within their local congregations, associations, the Southeast Conference and the national setting of the United Church of Christ. Their leadership within the church includes serving as congregational

moderators, spiritual directors, members of the Southeast Conference Board of Directors, supply preachers, and justice and witness ministers. TAP participants and graduates embody the notion of the priesthood of all believers, living out the principle that all Christians are called to ministry by virtue of their baptism.

The 2006 TAP graduates include Wanda Bain, Hugh Hogan, Donny Perry and Rip Hardman from the East Alabama/West Georgia Association, and Khethe Cox, Vanessa Robb, Pam Dent, Sue Couillet, Don Couillet, Kate Stulce, Leslie Smith, and Alex McGregor from Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, Tennessee. All of these participants successfully completed a 10-course curriculum that focuses on theological reflection, Biblical interpretation, and practices in ministry.

For more information about TAP or to start a group in your area, please contact Rev. Kathy Clark, TAP's executive director, at kclark@secucc.org.

Revitalized SEC Website Launched

By Rev. Cameron Trimble

Have you been to the Conference website lately at www.secucc.org? We have spent the past six months redesigning and developing a new website that we hope will become a useful tool for you in your local church.

We have new sections describing the ministries of the Conference available to your church, a directory of the churches in our Conference, and tools and resources for new church development, leadership development and church vitality. We also have a section for Conference news, a Conference calendar and a Shameless Commerce Department — the SEC Store featuring "God is Still Speaking, Y'all" shirts.



But perhaps the most useful section of the site is called the SEC Online Forum. A forum is an online community where anyone can log in and post information that can be read and shared by everyone else. For example, if your church has a special service coming up that you want others in the Conference to know about, you can log into the forum and post the details under the "Announcement" section. Or if you have a prayer request that you want to share with your friends or colleagues, you can log in and post that under the "Joys and Concerns."

If you would like to connect with other people who do similar mission work or have similar support group issues, you can set up a space and converse there. The possibilities are endless!

So how do you log in? From the main page, you will see a button on the left navigation tool bar that says "SEC Online Forum." Clicking this button will direct you to the forum. Once there, you will see a small button that says "register" at the top of the page. Please provide your name and create a username (preferably one we recognize when you post information).

Once you are registered, you can click on any of the sections of the forum and post information relevant to that section by clicking on the "New Topic" button. You may also respond to someone else's post by clicking on the topic and then clicking on "Post Reply."

We hope that you will find the new website a helpful tool. If you have any trouble accessing the Forum or have any questions about the site, contact Rev. Cameron Trimble at the Conference office or at ctrimble@secucc.org.

Concerns and Celebrations

■ **Rev. Lisa Stewart**, serving on the pastoral staff of **Virginia-Highland Church** (A Baptist and UCC Congregation), Atlanta, was ordained to that position at a service on June 11.

■ **Rev. Budd Friend-Jones**, pastor of **Central Congregational UCC**, Atlanta, has just returned from leading an interfaith pilgrimage to Morocco, Gibraltar and Spain.

■ **Rev. Tom Warren**, pastor of **Pleasant Hill Community UCC**, Pleasant Hill, Tenn., is serving for one week in July as the UCC chaplain at the Chautauqua Institute, in N.Y.

■ In May, **Rev. Ken Samuel**, pastor and founder of **Victory UCC**, Stone Mountain, Ga., was a featured preacher at the nationally renowned Festival of Homiletics. He will also be going the summer to the Philippines to teach and preach at Silliman University as a visiting scholar.

■ **Rev. Sarah Kim**, co-pastor of **Salim UCC**, was ordained at **Church of the Savior UCC** in Roswell, Ga., on July 9. There were 70 people present. Sarah is the first American-educated Korean woman ordained in the United Church of Christ. The preacher for the occasion was **Rev. Hojun Chang**, a leader of Korean pastors in the UCC.

■ We were saddened to learn of the death of **Ray Berry** who served a number of congregations in the Southeast Conference before moving on to serve ministries on Indian Reservations in South Dakota. The last church Ray had served in this conference was **United Church of Huntsville, UCC**. Ray was a resident of Uplands Retirement Village.



Rev. Kim and Rev. Chang

Nehemiah Initiative Works to Establish Four New Churches

Renewing Existing Congregations, Seeking New Affiliations Also Among Goals

By Rev. Cameron Trimble

Because of the national Still Speaking Initiative, we have discovered that the Southeast Conference among the most viable mission field in all of the United Church of Christ. In response, our national office has awarded us a grant of \$200,000, which our Conference matched. This money is the seed funding we will use to launch the Nehemiah Initiative.

The Nehemiah Initiative's mission is to build and establish at least four new and viable UCC churches in the Southeast Conference by 2008 by actively responding to the sense of urgency created through the Still Speaking Initiative. We want to do this by:

- Increasing our lay and ecclesiastical leadership capacity through recruitment, assessment, training, and mentoring
- Generating and directing the use of financial resources to respond to the Great Commission
- Establishing benchmarks and



timelines assuring accountability for new churches and their leadership

- Developing and implementing a standardized strategy for individual congregations starting new churches in the United Church of Christ

- Advancing local and national efforts to promote the mission and identity of the United Church of Christ

We are excited to report that we are well on our way to meeting our goals. We are experimenting with new ministry models, training new church start pastors and networking with other conferences throughout the UCC to build a strong coaching and mentoring network.

We launched our first Leadership

Development Workshop on June 23-24th with Rev. Steve Gifford and had 16 participants from six churches within the conference. Our next Leadership Workshop will be on August 3-4th with Rev. Bennie Liggins and Rev. Nancy Elsenheimer from our national office.

We are working with three congregations in the process of renewal and have been blessed with the affiliation of three congregations in the past six months, hopefully with more to follow.

These are excited days in the life of our Conference. We blessed in many, many ways. Let us keep praying for the wisdom to guide our vision, the humility to ground us in God's spirit, the courage to speak truth in the face of injustice and the perseverance to birth new churches in the Southeast Conference.

For more information about the Nehemiah Initiative, see the Conference website at <http://www.secucc.org/development/>.

News & Announcements

- † The Conference welcomes as our new *Voices and Visions* editor, **Michael Cheek**, a member of **Pilgrimage UCC**, Marietta, Ga. In addition to editing the newsletter which will now be published six times a year (up from four), Michael will provide the Conference his services in graphic design, development of brochures and literature, and assist with design related to the website.
- † We were saddened by the news that the mother of **Gerri Ryons Hudson**, SEC executive administrator, passed away in May following a long illness. At Mix in '06, Gerri was recognized for her leadership of the National UCC Office Support Staff Network, having just retired from the position of president of the organization.
- † The Conference is sponsoring a **UCC History and Polity** class this summer, which will take place August 24-26. If you have an

interest in this, please contact Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org immediately.

- † The new Constitution and Bylaws of the Southeast Conference were adopted provisionally for a period of one year at the Annual Meeting. A copy of the Bylaws is available from Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org on request or can be viewed at www.secucc.org. Hearings will be scheduled throughout the year for reflection and feedback. Comments can be submitted to Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org.
- † At the Annual Meeting of the Conference, the following congregations were recognized as Covenant Keepers, churches that have pledged to tithe 10 percent of their operating budgets in 2006 to the support of OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Basic Support: **Holy Trinity Community UCC**, Nashville; **Unity UCC**, Montgomery, Ala.; **Grace UCC**, Crossville, Tenn.; **United Church of Cookeville**, UCC, Cookeville, Tenn.; and **Beloved Community UCC**, Birmingham, Ala.
- † Committed to be a "Striving to Tithe" congregation, **Central Congregational UCC**, Atlanta, committed to raise its OCWM giving by 1 percent of its operating budget a year until it achieves a tithe. If your congregation is not listed as a Covenant Keeper or a Striving to Tithe congregation and should be, please contact Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org.
- † The **Lanett Congregational Christian Church UCC** of Lanett,

Ala., hosted a valley-wide 2006 National Day of Prayer on May 4th.

- † **First Congregational UCC**, Atlanta, received press coverage in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* on the occasion of its move out of its current building beginning June 12, as they undertake a two-year, \$6 million renovation of their building and sanctuary. They have located their offices and will be worshipping on the campus of Morris Brown College.
- † **Holy Trinity Community UCC**, Nashville received excellent press coverage in the *Tennessean* and on MSNBC.com on the occasion of preparing to join the UCC.
- † **Pleasant Hill Community UCC**, Pleasant Hill, Tenn., received a glowing article in the *UC News*, June-July edition. Their pastor, **Tom Warren** was quoted as saying, "this place is filled with church members, who know what the church is, who love the church, and never miss a service. Our sanctuary is packed to the gills." The congregation has just initiated a study process as the first step toward discerning whether they wish to become an Open and Affirming Church.
- † The following congregations appear in the UCC Calendar of Prayer this year: **Victory UCC**, Stone Mountain, Ga., on August 2, asking for prayers for their pastoral care and counseling ministry; and **Beloved Community UCC**, Birmingham, Ala., on August 15 asking for prayers to "heal the divide across race and class."

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Mark your calendars with events of importance to you and your congregation.

August 4-5
Leadership Development Workshop
Vision Development
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

August 12
Georgia-South Carolina Association
Church and Ministry Committee
TBA, Atlanta, GA

August 22
Georgia/South Carolina Association
Executive Committee
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

August 24-26
UCC History and Polity Class
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 5
Alliance of Baptist, UCC, Disciples
Partnership Nashville Regional
Meeting
Holy Trinity Community Church,
Nashville, TENN.

September 6
Southeast Conference Staff Meeting
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 8-9
Leadership Development Workshop
Marks of a Hospitable Church
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 9
Georgia/South Carolina Association
Church and Ministry Committee
Central Congregational UCC,
Atlanta, GA

September 11-12
Southern Regional Conference
Ministers Meeting
Southern Conference Offices, Elon,
NC

September 14
Southeast Conference Finance
Committee
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 15-16
Church and Ministry Committees
Training Event
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 18-19
National Ecumenical Partnership
Coordinating Committee
(Alliance-UCC-Disciples)
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 22-23
Southeast Conference Board of
Directors Meeting
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 26
Georgia/South Carolina Association
Executive Committee
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

September 29-30
Leadership Development Workshop
i-Tools for Today's Leaders
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

October 2-4
Council of Conference Ministers
Cleveland, OH

A NEW CHURCH IS BORN

Has your church ever thought about birthing another church in the Southeast Conference? Many churches within the United Church of Christ are learning that one of the greatest gifts to an existing church is the privilege of birthing another congregation. This can be a rewarding mission that both renews the parent church and brings new life to areas that do not yet have a UCC presence. If you would like more information about exploring this in your church, contact Rev. Cameron Trimble at 404.607.1993 or at ctrimble@secucc.org.